Letter from Taizé

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Holy Spirit, you breathe upon all that is frail in us. You kindle in us the flame of living charity which smoulders under the ashes. And even the fears and the nights of our heart can, through you, become the dawn of a new life. *prayer by Brother Roger*

Stainede glass window, Chartres Cathedral.

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THE PILGRIMAGE OF TRUST IN PARIS

A Festival of Trust

Hours spent on the telephone, in public transport, in numerous meetings, both in Paris and in the suburbs or the little towns that you reach after crossing fields and forests, and there is a real network taking shape, made up of faces and extended hands.

For more than two months, a team of Brothers, volunteers and Sisters of Saint-André, has been present in Paris to work at the preparation for the European Meeting with the parishes of the whole region.

Daring to make the gesture that transforms the everyday

It is not so much the questions of organisation, which call for imagination, but knowing how to share the joy of the Meeting and the Welcome with the whole district. How, knowing that it is perhaps not the most crystal-clear sign of the Gospel to open the door of your house, to invite people to welcome pilgrims. How can we go about making young people feel really at home in other people's homes, and happy to realize that we are at the same time the same as them, and different. There is, in this desire to spread the invitation as widely as possible, a Festival of Trust, expecting to see people daring to make a gesture which can transform the everyday and get you out of the anonymity of the big city or the new estates with their shifting population. In French "hôte" means both "host" - the one who welcomes - and "guest" - the one who receives a welcome. What an adventure not to know who is giving and who receiving! To become the host/guest of God, as the Polish proverb says, by welcoming one who comes to share hope: this is the challenge offered to the 850 parishes of the Paris Region.

At Mantes-la-Jolie, at Houilles, in the industrial Valley of the Seine, the little team of young people decided to set up a stand at the Saturday morning market to try to find host-families. At Rozay-en-Brie, a little town in the Seine-et-Marne, the parish priest decided to go round the local shops to ask for help and to prepare breakfasts with their leftovers for those who would be put up collectively. In Meaux, a young person, gifted at drawing, made up a small illustrated paper in order to introduce the Meeting to children and teenagers. Nearly everywhere, the Welcome and the preparation involve a lot more people than just the members of the Parish. Some town-halls have already undertaken to make their sports-halls

available to accommodate people if there aren't enough families, and to publish a little article in the local news-sheet to invite people to welcome those arriving in their homes.

The inner implications of the Meeting

Even if the Meeting involves being concerned with lots of practical details, those who are getting it ready discover little by little the inner implications of such a Meeting. In the course of a diocesan launch-meeting at Pontoise, Mgr Renaudin, the Bishop, spoke to those who had taken up the challenge of getting things ready, encouraging them to set off on a pilgrimage of Trust: "Ever since I read the little booklet from Taizé I have been constantly asking myself the question: why are they daring to do this? Is it a wager, is it a challenge, a provocation? Is it just thoughtless? While there are so many serious and competent people telling you to be on your guard, how can you set about launching a Pilgrimage of Trust? (...) Today, as on Easter Morning, everything is entrusted to us. The Father in his Son, in his Spirit, has entrusted to us, to each one of us, his heart, his life, his love and his power to love and the power to give beyond all giving. He has entrusted to us the Earth, brothers and sisters, the whole creation. He has entrusted himself to us, for everyone, beginning with those who are the most lost (...) I am full of joy at the thought of all that is going to happen with the grace of God during this Pilgrimage of Trust (...) I tell you: I have full confidence in you."

These months of Autumn give also numerous chances to discover already so many signs of hope, and through the multitude of contacts which are forged, a unique opportunity to share with all sorts of very different people, by going from one to the other. One Brother, with a few young volunteers, went with one of the chaplains of Fleury-Mérogis prison for a celebration and a moment of sharing in the young offenders' detention centre. For a long time already, several teams of young people from Essonne have been taking it in turns every week to go and lead the Sunday celebrations in different buildings of the largest prison in Europe.. One young Hungarian girl, returning from one such visit, wrote: "It meant a lot to me to be able to greet prisoners as if we were friends of long standing. They were very welcoming. The prayer was very simple. The whole visit made such an impression on me that I can't find, nor do I want to find, words to describe it. To spend a few hours together, to exchange ideas about our lives... I would like to go back after the Meeting to swap a few ideas about the welcome and tell them how, in the event, the five days of peace went...."

The Secret Beauty of Local Communities

We seem to glimpse little by little that those who come will be touched especially by these few simple signs of sharing or solidarity which make up the sometimes secret beauty of the local communities. To find Christians in Paris, and Christians for whom the faith is lived as a joyful commitment in society and modernity, will perhaps be one of the most beautiful surprises that the City Of Lights is keeping for them.

The preparations are intensive also in all the countries of Europe, like Germany, where prayers followed by meetings are planned for November, or in Poland, from which very large groups are due to come, but where these groups make an effort of intense preparation every year: "The young people meet in small groups of twelve until the departure for Paris, reflecting on the theme of the Pilgrimage. Why do I want commit myself on these pilgrim-ways? Am I aware of not being alone on this road? At the time of his last visit to Poland, Pope John-Paul II reminded his fellow-countrymen of the urgency of living out an inventive charity. The preparation for the Meeting hopes to be also a response to this call. How can I, from now on, share my time and my joy?"

Memories of the last meeting

Eight years after the last European meeting held in Paris, people's memories remain close. Hélène and Jean Paul, from a parish in a southern district of Paris, bear witness to this in their letter:

"We found that taking part in the preparation and welcome for the last meeting was the beginning of a human and spiritual adventure which has had a great effect on us. Coming from the outer suburbs, we were not really at ease in Paris, either in the city or in our parish. Our first steps towards welcoming the young people were, therefore, to discover and encounter the goodwill that surrounded us. We were helped by the curate of our parish, the leader of the local schools' chaplaincy, and a young volunteer sent from Taizé to help in the southern districts of Paris. We were astonished to see the gradual growth of a network of people ready to open the doors of their houses, for five days, to young foreigners who were complete strangers to them.

A few meetings (not too many) and many conversations enabled us to discern a diverse mixture of motivations: to contribute to the understanding between nations; to support the religious searching of young people; to work for Christian Unity; to be enriched by meeting others... We were surprised by the average age of those offering a welcome: between 40 and 80 years of age! Many young people and families had gone away for the Christmas holiday, but several very elderly ladies proved to have astonishing energy. To give one example among so many, two of these ladies, who lived in the same building, prepared a farewell New Year dinner together.

Next, we had to organise the reception of over three hundred young people. The parish alone could not cope, but by joining forces and sharing sites with those of the neighbouring parishes of our deanery, all became possible. Among our welcomers, one spoke Croatian and another Polish, and so the majority of our 'contingent' of guests consisted of young people from Eastern Europe. They brought us a direct witness of the vitality of the faith in their countries. After the joyful commotion of the day of welcome, the prayer next morning was for us a little miracle. There in our church, where the people who gather are usually grey haired and respectable, was found a motley crowd of young people, radiating good humour. And, following them, there came also some welcomers, who were quickly won over by the silence of the gathering, by the beauty of the song, and by the economy of words characterising these prayers. This miracle was repeated on the following mornings and on New Year's Eve. How could we fail to want to continue this? From the experiences of those days was born in us an urgent desire to begin, in our church, times of prayer that were open to all Christians.

Another special time was the morning when we were to give the young people a presentation on the life of our parish. The unobtrusive and patient commitment of a few people – whom we barely knew – suddenly took on a new dimension. The lamp which we could have thought to be only a night light began to shine out and to enlighten our night. As for the young people – they communicated to us all their enthusiasm."

A PRAYER

before the meeting in Paris

Songs

Venite, exultemus *or*
Lord Jesus Christ

Alleluia, slava tiebie Bože

Psalm 18 *sung or said with Alleluia between each verse*

I love you, Lord, my strength, my Saviour, you have saved me from violence, (v.2)

I take refuge in God, my rock, my stronghold, … I call upon the Lord and I am saved from my enemies. (vv. 3-4)

They assailed me on my day of disaster but Yahweh was there to support me. (v. 19)

He delivered me and set me in the open. He rescued me because he loves me. (v. 20)

Lord, you yourself are my lamp; my God lights up my darkness. With my God I can leap over a wall. (vv. 29-30)

Bible reading
Matthew 5:1-10

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Song

The Kingdom of God *or*
In manus tuas

Silence

Litany *sung or spoken with Kyrie Eleison between each prayer*

Lord Christ, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: You are the salt of the earth.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: Love your enemies.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: Do good to those who hate you.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: Be merciful.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: Pray, ask, seek and you will find.
—May your word enlighten us.

Lord Christ, you tell us: Seek first the Kingdom of God.
—May your word enlighten us.

Our Father

Song

Ubi caritas *or*
Nada te turbe

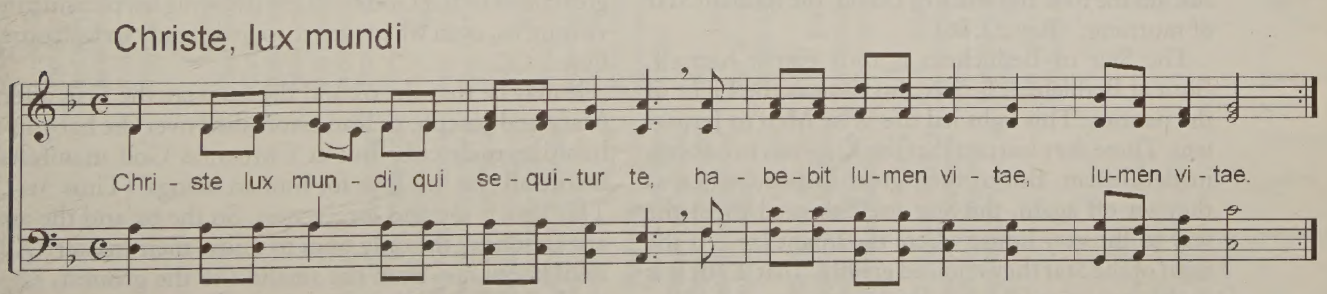
Prayer

Holy Spirit, you breathe upon all that is frail in us. You kindle in us the flame of living charity which smoulders under the ashes. And even the fears and the nights of our heart can, through you, become the dawn of a new life.

Songs

Da pacem in diebus

Christe lux mundi



(O Christ, light of the world, whoever follows you will have the light of life. / Ô Christ, lumière du monde, qui te suit aura la lumière de la vie. / Christus, Licht der Welt, wer dir nachfolgt, wird das Licht des Lebens haben. / Cristo, luz del mundo, quien te sigue tendrá la luz de la vida. / O Cristo, luce del mondo, chi ti segue avrà la luce della vita. / Cristo, luz do mundo, quem te segue terá a luz da vida. / Krisztus, világ világossága, aki téged követ, azé lesz az élet világossága. / O Chryste, światości świata, kto idzie za Tobą, będzie miał światło życia.)

CHRISTMAS

What is the meaning of the Star of Bethlehem?

St Matthew's Gospel, which is the only one to mention the Star, is very discreet, even about the birth of Jesus. An angel announces to Joseph: 'Mary will give birth to a child, and you will call his name "Jesus": because it is he who will save his people from their sins.' Then a few words suffice to say that this birth took place: 'She brought forth a son and called him by the name of Jesus.' (Mt 1:21 and 25)

By this discreet account, Matthew conveys to us that the coming of Jesus occurred unnoticed. He is to save his people but, except for Mary and Joseph, nobody in Israel seems to be aware that a King of the Jews, the Messiah of the line of David, has been born. Those who do realize it are foreigners and pagans, 'Wise Men from the East' (Mt 2:1-12).

The 'East' means Mesopotamia, famed since high antiquity for its astronomical science. Its calendars were accurate. They knew how to calculate and predict the movements of the stars. But the stars were not simple physical bodies: they were venerated as divinities and celestial powers. This is why astronomers were also men of religion. Observing the heavens, they deciphered messages there. The 'Wise Men' who came from the 'East' to pay homage to Jesus were just such religious astronomers.

The place of honour accorded to the Wise Men at the beginning of the Gospel is astonishing, considering the antagonism of the Bible to astrological cults. But the point is that Matthew is aware of the saying of Jesus: 'The last shall be first.' The Messiah of Israel has been born and it is foreigners who are the first to know it! From the beginning Matthew lets us know that Jesus has come for all. He is the promised King, of the line of David, but he is at the same time the Light to enlighten the whole human race. 'I, Jesus, am the root and stock of David, the Radiant Star of morning;' (Rev 22:16)

The Star of Bethlehem is thus Christ himself. Born at Bethlehem he has also risen as the Light of the nations. This light led the Wise Men to Jerusalem. There they learned that the King was to be born in Bethlehem. But to their great surprise, when as they set off again, the Star itself showed them the way to the very house where the infant lay. 'At the sight of the Star they rejoiced greatly.' (Mt 2:10) It is in this way that Christ is 'with us to the end of the ages' (Mt 28) to give us joy and to shed light on our path.

Where do the ox and the ass come from in the scenes of the Nativity?

The ox and the ass of Bethlehem are not to be found in the Gospels. But Saint Luke tells how Jesus was born in a stable, and that Mary had to lay her new-born child in a manger. Luke makes a point of this crib, which he mentions no less than three times in a few verses (Lk 2:7-16). The mention of the crib is what has inspired the representation of the ox and the ass, for they remind readers familiar with the prophets of a passage from Isaiah: 'The ox knows its owner and the ass the crib of its master – but Israel does not know, my people do not understand' (Is 1:3).

The crib is a 'sign' (Lk 2:12). It signifies many things. It speaks of the poor welcome given to Jesus. For lack of a place among men, he was born in the company of animals. Recalling Isaiah, the crib with the ox and the ass evokes the sorrow of God. While the ass knows the crib of its master, the people whom God has chosen among all others 'does not understand'. The Son of God is born and no one realizes anything. It is a grief to God that the creatures he loves the most are those who know him least.

But the crib is also a positive sign. Christmas is a turning-point. By becoming a human being, God ties again the threads of the covenant. He stops complaining about his unfaithful people and simply comes among them. He is there, sleeping in a crib. The ox and the ass remind us that God did not scorn the mess and the smells of an inn-stable. And if a rough manger is acceptable to him as a child's bed, he will not despise our hearts.

Christmas is the 'Yes' of God. Heaven sings: 'Glory to God in the highest and on Earth peace to men, his beloved.' Sometimes we say, following the old Latin version: 'Peace to men of good will.' This is certainly true, but word for word the expression should be translated: 'Peace to men of (God's) good pleasure.' The great news is that God finds joy in loving us, pleasure in visiting us, even when we are so little ready to welcome him.

It may be that the ox and the ass were the first, after Mary and Joseph, to lean astonished over the baby inhabiting their crib. But at Christmas God manifests before all else 'his love for human beings' (Titus 3:4). This love is joy and forgiveness. So the ox and the ass are no longer the only ones to know their master. 'All shall know me, from the smallest to the greatest, says the Lord, for I shall pardon their offence and no longer remember their sin.' (Jer 31:34)

JANUARY

Lk 2:16-21
1 Wed The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and then returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

2 Co 3:1-6
2 Thu Paul writes to the Corinthians: You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Ep 1:3-10
3 Fri God has let us know the mystery of his good purpose: to bring all things together under Christ as head.

Is 66:18
4 Sat The Lord says: I am coming to gather the people of every nation and language, and they will see my glory.

Mt 2:1-12
5 SUN When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

Ep 3:2-6
6 Mon EPIPHANY
Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

Rm 15:7-13
7 Tue Accept one another just as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God.

Rm 8:18-25
8 Wed Paul writes: The whole of creation has been groaning as in childbirth up to the present time. And we too groan inwardly as we wait with eagerness for our bodies to be set free.

Lk 19:1-10
9 Thu Jesus said: The Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.

Ps 34
10 Fri The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those whose spirit is crushed.

Lk 16:1-13
11 Sat Jesus said: No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Mk 1:6-11
12 SUN At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

Ex 3:1-15
13 Mon Moses said to God, "If I tell the people: 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am; thus you shall say to them, '«I am» has sent me to you.'"

1 S 12:20-24
14 Tue Adore only God; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

1 Co 15:12-28
15 Wed Paul writes: Christ has been raised from the dead. For just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

Ps 55:17-19
16 Thu To God I call and he saves me, evening, morning and at noon. God's peace delivers my soul, for he hears my cry.

2 Co 4:5-7
17 Fri We do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are your servants for Jesus' sake.

Jn 21:15-17
18 Sat Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jn 1:35-42
19 SUN Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

Is 43:1-4a
20 Mon The Lord says: You are precious in my eyes, I value you and I love you.

Mk 2:13-14
21 Tue As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Mt 5:38-42
22 Wed Jesus said: Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

Lk 1:67-79
23 Thu At John the Baptist's birth, Zechariah said: Blessed be God, who allows us to serve him without fear.

Ps 145
24 Fri All look to you in hope, O God. And with generous hand, you satisfy every living creature.

Ga 2:19-20
25 Sat Paul writes: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Mk 1:16-20
26 SUN Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people."

Hab 2:1-4
27 Mon I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me saying, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

Lk 17:11-19
28 Tue To the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for healing him, Jesus said: Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.

Lk 20:27-38
29 Wed Jesus said: God is not a God of the dead but of the living; for him all people are alive.

Ps 4
30 Thu Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. You have set me free from my distress.

Is 42:10-17
31 Fri The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

FEBRUARY

1 Sat Is 42:1-7
The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.

2 SUN Lk 2:22-32
PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When he saw the child Jesus, Simeon praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.

3 Mon Ps 147
Give praise to the Lord! It is good to sing praises to the one who heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

4 Tue Mt 11:28-30
Jesus said: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

5 Wed Mt 21:28-31
Jesus said: A father said to his two sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The first replied, "I will not," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The second replied, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? Those listening said, "The first."

6 Thu 1 Co 13:1-13
Love is patient and kind. Love does not seek its own advantage, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth.

7 Fri Jm 1:12-15
James writes: Let no one say when they are tempted, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

8 Sat Is 43:18-21
The Lord says: Look, I am doing something new, even now it is emerging, do you not see it? Yes, I am making a way in the desert and my people will sing my praises.

9 SUN Mk 1:29-39
In the evening, after sunset, people brought to Jesus the sick and the possessed. He healed them and drove out many evil spirits.

10 Mon Is 45:18-19
The Lord says: I did not tell my people to search for me in chaos. I am the Lord God, who proclaims justice, who speaks what is true.

11 Tue Ps 19
The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

12 Wed Jn 13:31-35
Jesus said: It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

13 Thu Is 40:1-5
Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

14 Fri Lk 10:1-9
Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

15 Sat Mk 2:15-17
Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

16 SUN Mk 1:40-45
A leper came to Jesus and said, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

17 Mon Mt 4:12-17
Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

18 Tue 2 P 1:5-8
Seek perseverance, true devotion, mutual kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

19 Wed Mt 6:7-15
Jesus said: Some think that by using many words in their prayer, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

20 Thu Is 6:1-8
In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

21 Fri 1 P 3:8-17
Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called.

22 Sat Mk 4:1-9,13-20
Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

23 SUN Mk 2:1-12
Four people came, bringing a paralysed man, and they lowered the mat on which he lay in front of Jesus. Jesus, when he saw their faith, said to the paralytic, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

24 Mon Mt 5:1-12
Jesus' disciples came to him and he taught them saying: Happy are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

25 Tue Ezk 34:1-16
The Lord says: I will take care of my flock. I shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the strays, bandage the injured and strengthen the sick. I shall watch over the one that is healthy and strong.

26 Wed 1 Tm 4:7-16
St. Paul writes: Train yourself to live in godliness: it holds out promise both for the present life and the life to come.

27 Thu Mt 5:1-12
Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

28 Fri Mk 9:17-29
Someone said to Jesus: I believe! Help my lack of faith.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JOHANNINE HOURS

January: Jonah 2:1-5

When all seems to be finished for Jonah, he is saved by a 'great fish', a monster, which traditionally symbolises death. We know nothing of the nature of this fish. It becomes like a parable: God can even make use of adverse forces in order to save. This monster becomes a domestic animal in the garden of God.

What does Jonah experience inside the fish's stomach? He comes through an experience of death. This experience of intense solitude is precisely the opposite of the strongest experience that we can undergo in the 'Temple' (v. 5), the experience of the presence of God.

Does Jonah's prayer show that situations of distress teach us to pray? It is true that, in the bible, we find many prayers of people who are in extreme situations. 'I cried out to the Lord and he answered me; I called, you heard my voice'. (v. 3) God responds immediately - so fast that we could think that the prayer itself is God's response: he puts himself in the cry of prayer, he is with us to the depths, he makes this prayer his own, there is his place, his presence with us. When Peter begins to sink, as he is walking on the sea towards Jesus, as soon as he calls, the hand of Jesus is already there (Mt 14 :30-31).

In Jonah's prayer, it is only from verse 4 onwards that distress is concretely described. It is as if distress can only be well-understood when we are not alone, when the Lord is with us. It is then that we are able to face up to distress, express it and reveal it. And the fact that we can express it, cry out to God, is in itself the answer to the prayer.

- What place does prayer have amidst the joyful or painful events of my life? How does it help me to pick up again, to make a fresh start?
- What ways of prayer most help me to express, to bring out what I hold inside myself?

February: Zephaniah 3:16-18

Madeleine Delbrêl, a 20th century French mystic, wrote the following lines in 1938. She had begun to live out a community presence with others in a poor working class town on the outskirts of Paris, with a desire to share as much as possible in the daily life of the neighbourhood. These lines can be read as an echo of the text where the prophet Zephaniah speaks of God as "the one who will dance with shouts of joy over us".

"To be a good dancer with you, Lord, as elsewhere, there is no need for us to know where it will lead. We must follow, be lively, be nimble, and above all not be inflexible. We must not ask you to explain the steps which you are pleased to take, we must be a kind of agile and living extension of you, and receive the rhythm of the orchestra as you pass it on to us. We must not want to go forwards at all costs, but accepts turnings, changes of direction ...

If we were content with you, Lord, we would not be able to resist this need to dance, which sweeps over the world, and we would come to guess which dance you would like to get us dancing ...

Lord, come and ask us to dance. We are ready to dance you this errand we have to do, these accounts, the meal we have to prepare, this vigil when we feel drowsy. We are ready to dance you the dance of our work, dancing in the heat, dancing later in the cold. If some melodies are often in a minor key, we will not tell you that they are sad; if others leave us gasping a little, we will not tell you that they are making us breathless. And if people bump into us, we will accept it with a laugh, well aware that it always happens when you are dancing.

Lord, come and ask us to dance!"

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Senegal

"Very small projects"

On the initiative of the Taizé brothers living in Dakar, Senegal, a reception service for refugees and immigrants (P.A.R.I.) was set up in 1995, under the auspices of Caritas-Dakar. The parishes and the religious communities of the city confided to it an activity that is becoming more and more necessary as the numbers of displaced persons increases in this Western horn of Africa.

From the start, the P.A.R.I. has put the accent on helping these urban refugees to assume their responsibilities: it is essential that they themselves take charge of their needs and their insertion in the varied and highly developed informal sector of life in Dakar. The principal means of doing this has been through the promotion of "very small projects".

First of all the P.A.R.I. asks the refugee by what job he feels able to assure his survival, in a context where he can expect no permanent assistance from anyone. It is the refugee himself who has to find the response to this question so that he genuinely commits himself in his project. Next, he is asked to draw up a list and an estimate for the equipment, materials, and eventually the produce that he believes he needs. The P.A.R.I. examines the project, has it amended and systematically favours those that imply a profit through the work of the person concerned. Purely commercial propositions are however usually avoided.

Among the most frequent projects, there is haircutting, making and repairing shoes, making doughnuts, setting up a street restaurant, working in the port or in the markets thanks to the provision of a rickshaw, etc... The projects do not exceed 25 000 Fcfa (around 37 Euro). This is a non-returnable gift. However it is never money that is handed over. It is the P.A.R.I. that purchases the material and gives it to the person concerned.

Next, the P.A.R.I. controls the setting up of the project through regular visits. Given the mobility of many of these activities, this is no easy matter. Some who have persevered and appear particularly painstaking are given an extra "hand" after one year.

The success rate, around 60%, appears fairly satisfactory. It can happen that a refugee moves from one activity to another, selling the material provided by the P.A.R.I. No matter. What counts in the long run is that he takes charge of his life.

The P.A.R.I. does not claim that these "very small projects" provide lasting solutions for the problems of refuges, even if some of them do persevere and survive for years thanks to their project. Above all this is a means of making people become responsible and a practical way giving them a leg up.

Many of these "refugees" are in fact "stranded migrants". Setting out to find a better life, often sent by their families whose great hope they are, they have run aground and lost all their savings. Others have been repatriated from Europe and ended up in Dakar because it was not as far away as their own country. They cannot go home, not only because they do not have the means to do so, but above all because they have

failed in what they were supposed to do. They are ashamed. And they are unable to pay back those who clubbed together to pay their journey. So they stay on in Dakar, getting by as best as they can, like many Senegalese who are not much better off than they are.

During the football "World Cup", much was said about the "Lions of the Teranga". The word "teranga" means traditional Senegalese hospitality. It is to this hospitality that witness is borne through the exceptional welcome and tolerance shown towards the influx of refugees from abroad, representing all the countries of Africa.

Philippines

A path of reconciliation

From Mindanao, in the Philippines, where there is much tension between Christians and Muslims, and where the writer's parish priest was killed a year ago: "How is life in the village now? Since I was in Taizé two years ago, how much has the climate among the young people been affected by the situation in the Middle East? I still remember the beautiful moments with Palestinian young people in Taizé. One of them was a Muslim girl who even went inside the Church of Reconciliation and prayed with us. Her close friends are all Christians. That was a truly enriching time for me because before, based on what I read in the news, I had always presumed that Palestinians were fanatics. But it was in those simple, honest, warm moments with them that my prejudice against them vanished. We laughed at the same jokes and we grieved about similar issues regarding human rights today. Reflecting on my experiences with them, I am amazed at their deep faith in God, amidst the uncertainty that surrounds them every day. They may not be officially recognized as a state by most of the world, but they have an identity that is rooted in God. Back here in Mindanao, we celebrated the anniversary of the death of Father Rufus with a fellowship meal with Muslim people that lasted all afternoon."

Albania

Being part of a large family

In August, just before leaving for home, a young person from Albania wrote "For ten years now, small groups from a small country called Albania have been coming to Taizé. They have come mainly from the major cities: Tirana, Shkodra and Durres. This year, for the first time, an Orthodox group has joined them. They bring many problems with them, for their lives are hard. They join with the others in the prayer; a prayer that gives them a sense of peace and of spiritual serenity. Together with young people from other countries, the frontiers become less high, for the love and the peace they encounter makes them feel part of a large family. This one-week experience is something we will recall all our lives. It is hard to find somewhere else where you are so unified with the surrounding atmosphere as we are here. Each one of us finds himself or herself in the songs, in the words addressed to God, just as we discover the generosity of God in welcoming us as we are, with our fears, anxieties and insecurities. Prayers, meetings and getting to know the others, transform our group into a laboratory of ideas for the future. Two days of travel are ahead of us. Then we are home and we begin to work out the projects we have been planning here."

Pakistan

A journey of love and communion

A few days ago, thousands of Pakistani Christians gathered around St Patrick's Cathedral, Karachi, asking for protection. This year, a series of violent attacks have taken 36 lives. On 26 September, we received this email from a young Pakistani woman who helped to prepare the Meeting in Barcelona at the end of 2000. "Yet another attack has taken the life of seven people. This time it happened at the justice and peace committee in Karachi. The news shook my heart, for three of them were my dear friends. It was here that I began my first experience of service and commitment to the poor and the downtrodden; the place that taught me to find happiness in service of the least privileged. In a moment, the 'school' where I learned love and humanity was shut down. But why? These were up lifters of the marginalized and peace ministers for the forgotten slum dwellers, some of them for 25 years. It was through them that I first contacted Taizé when the brothers came to Pakistan. I hope you will all pray for us to have courage to continue our journey of love and communion even if our hearts are broken and our eyes are tearful."

Laudate omnes gentes

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